ADVERTISEMENT

Russian troops seize Chernobyl after fierce battle with condition of radioactive material unknown, as Biden refuses to send in US military and Kiev sends terrified civilians to shelters

- **Russian forces have sized control of Chernobyl, with video revealing tanks parked in front of the reactor**
- **Came after 'fierce' battle with condition of nuclear waste storage facilities 'unknown', Ukraine said**
- **Meanwhile NATO-member Turkey said one of its ships was hit by a 'bomb' near Odessa - underlining fears that the alliance could easily get sucked into the conflict and spark all-out war in Europe**
- **Citizens in Kiev have been rushed to shelters, after the government warned Russia will soon bomb the city**

By CHRIS PLEASANCE and HARRIET ALEXANDER FOR DAILYMAIL.COM and NICK CRAVEN IN KIEV and WILL STEWART IN MOSCOW and SERGEY PANASHCHUK and RACHAEL BUNYAN FOR MAILONLINE

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Russian forces have seized control of Chernobyl nuclear power plant after a 'fierce' battle, with the condition of nuclear storage facilities 'unknown', sparking fears of a radiation leak that could cause fallout in Europe.

Video revealed Russian tanks and armoured vehicles standing in front of the destroyed reactor, which sits just 60 miles north of the capital Kiev.

An official said Russian shelling hit a radioactive waste repository and an increase in radiation levels was reported, although this has not yet been corroborated.

The International Atomic Energy Agency said it is following the situation in **Ukraine** 'with grave concern' and appealed for maximum restraint to avoid any action that may put Ukraine's nuclear facilities at risk.

Ukrainian presidential advisor Myhailo Podolyak said: 'After the absolutely senseless attack of the Russians in this direction, it is impossible to say that the Chernobyl nuclear power plant is safe.'

Meanwhile Turkey reported that one of its ships had been hit by a 'bomb' off the coast of Odessa, where fighting is also going on. Turkey is a member of NATO, underlining fears that the war in Ukraine could quickly suck in other states and spark an all-out conflict in Europe.

Speaking after the latest developments, Joe Biden announced more sanctions against Russia but admitted that he had not expected previous threats of financial penalties to deter Vladimir Putin.

He also resisted calls to send in US troops to Ukraine, saying he has no plans to speak to the Russian leader who he accuses of trying to rebuild a Soviet empire.

The sanctions will target Russian banks, oligarchs, state-controlled companies and high-tech sectors, but Russian oil and natural gas were exempt in a bid to avoid disruption to global markets.

- **G7 called Putin a 'threat to global order' vowing 'severe and coordinated economic and financial sanctions'**
- **Joe Biden announced new sanctions targeting Russian banks, exports and military**
- **Russia's largest bank Sberbank will be severed from the US financial system, and full sanctions are imposed on four other financial institutions**
- **Boris Johnson called the invasion a 'catastrophe for our continent' and branded Putin a 'dictator'**
- **China repeated calls for talks but refusing to criticise Russia's attack**
- **Moldova declared a state of emergency**
- **Turkish President Recep Tayyip Erdogan said invasion is 'heavy blow' to regional peace**
- **NATO ambassadors scheduled an emergency meeting on Thursday**
- **UN Security Council will discuss a resolution condemning the invasion**
- **Ukraine demanded the world banish Russia from SWIFT banking system**

'Putin is the aggressor. Putin chose this war. And now he and his country will bear the consequences,' Biden said in remarks at the White House.

Elsewhere, Kiev ordered civilians into bomb shelters and declared a curfew amid concerns **Russia** is about to strike the capital as Ukrainian troops lost control of a key airfield around 15 miles away. Russian forces had attacked it with around two dozen attack helicopters earlier in the day, four of which are thought to have been shot down.

'They are going to bomb Kyiv now. Authorities told us to hide i
authorities said a hospital had been hit, killing four people.

The Ukrainian army was this afternoon fighting in almost ever
control of military bases, airports, cities and ports from Kharki

It came after Vladimir Putin personally gave the order to attac
that American intelligence said involved more than 100 short

and surface-to-air missiles, and 75 bombers that targeted military sites including barracks, warehouses and airfields in order to knock out the country's military command structure.

Russia said the strikes destroyed 74 Ukrainian military ground facilities, 11 airfields, three command posts and 18 radar stations controlling Kiev's anti-aircraft batteries.

That was followed by attacks from Crimea in the south towards the city of Kherson, a northern advance from Belarus to Kiev, and an eastern advance from Belgorod towards Kharkiv where the heaviest fighting is going on.

American officials said this was merely an 'initial phase' of the attack, and that the majority of Russia's 190,000 troops at the front remain in reserve. The goal of the attack is to 'take key population centres' and 'decapitate the Ukrainian government', the officials added.

Ukraine's health ministry said so far 57 people have been killed on the first day of conflict, while 169 have been wounded.

The port cities of Mariupol and Odessa, where Ukraine's main naval bases are located, were also attacked - though Odessa appeared to remain under Ukrainian control as of Thursday afternoon. Russian tankers blockaded the Kerch Strait, leading from the Back Sea to the Sea of Azov, cutting off Mariupol.

Ukraine has hit back, shooting down five Russian helicopters, destroying dozens of tanks and capturing Russian troops.

A Russian AN-26 military transport aircraft also crashed in the southern Voronezh region, killing its crew on board.

The accident could have been caused by a technical failure and has not inflicted any damage on the ground, Interfax said, citing a press office of Russia's western military district.

Volodymyr Zelensky, in an address to the nation on Thursday evening, described Russia as 'evil' and said Putin had attacked 'like a suicidal scoundrel... just as Fascist Germany did in World War II'.

'Ukraine will not surrender its freedom, whatever Moscow thinks,' he added. 'For Ukrainians independence and the right to live free on our land is the highest value.'

He had earlier called on all Ukrainian citizens willing to defend their homeland to step forward, saying guns will be issued to everyone who wants one. He also asked for civilians to give blood to help wounded troops. And he asked world leaders to impose the 'harshest sanctions possible' on Putin.

British Prime Minister Boris Johnson, addressing the nation at midday, said western allies are preparing a 'massive' package of sanctions against Russia and told the people of Ukraine: 'We cannot and will not just look away.' Johnson referred to Putin as a 'dictator' who would never 'subdue the national feeling of the Ukrainians'.

As the West prepared to cut off Russia financially, Vladimir Putin summoned his oligarchs to demand loyalty over his attack on Ukraine - perhaps fearing a rebellion from within after prominent Russian TV figures and celebrities spoke out to oppose the conflict.

Speaking in the Kremlin, he said that Russia had been 'forced'
choice' but to attack, saying the country remains 'part of the g
we belong to'. 'I want you to show solidarity with the governm

Russian tanks surround Chernobyl nuclear power plant

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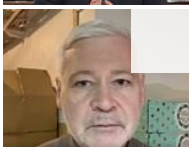
killed in broad daylight

Boebert heckles Biden at SOTU saying, 'you put them in, 13 of them'

Biden mixes up 'Ukrainian' with 'Iranian' during SOTU speech

Mayor of Kharkiv claims Russian shelling burnt a family alive in their car



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A Russian T-72 tank is pictured sitting in front of the main reactor at Chernobyl after Putin's forces seized it in a 'fierce' battle with the condition of nuclear storage facilities 'unknown'

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Russian armoured vehicles park on roads near the Chernobyl plant, amid fears that damage to the facility could cause a radiation leak that would blanket Europe with fallout

The attack has come to Ukraine on all fronts with bombs and missile hours, followed by troop attacks from Crimea, the Donbass, Belgoro power plants on the Dnieper River. Chernobyl nuclear power plant h

Russian Mi-8 helicopters seize control of airport minutes from Kiev

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Russian Mi-8 attack helicopters stage an assault on Gostomel air bas launched an all-out attack on the country

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Attack helicopters are pictured flying over the Kiev region of Ukraine after dozens of Russian aircraft attacked the city

Video appears to show Kiev residents packed into underground shelter

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0:00 / 0:38

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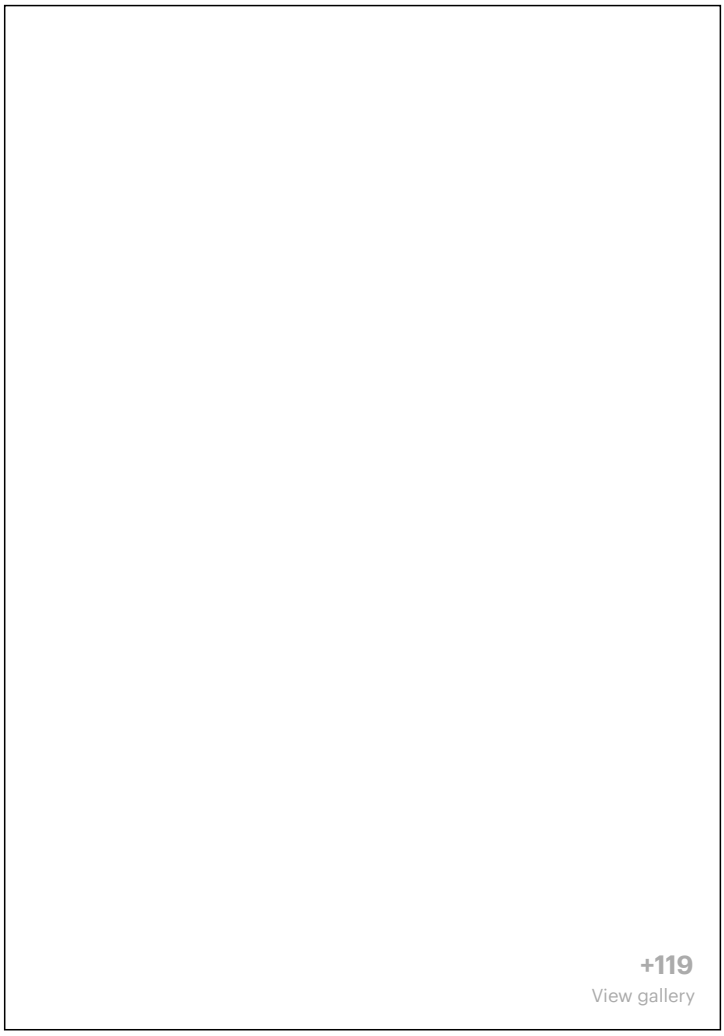
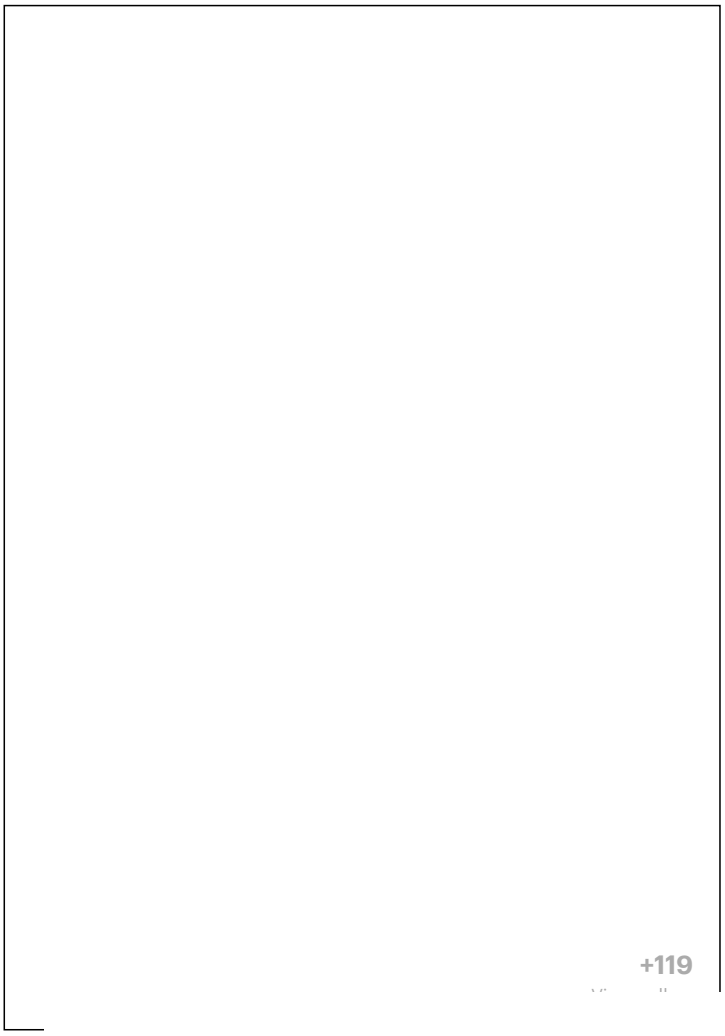
An image captured near Kiev shows what appears to be the wreckage of a downed Russian attack helicopter with a soldier parachuting out of it (to the left of the frame)

Tanks seen fighting in middle of traffic just outside Kharkiv

0:00 / 0:32





A Russian helicopter is shot down somewhere over Kiev (left), while skies near the capital (right)

Russian military helicopters fly over hydroelectric power plan

0:00 / 1:26

A huge explosion is seen at Vinnytsia military base, in central Ukrain

Putin tells his oligarchs Ukraine invasion was 'desperate mea

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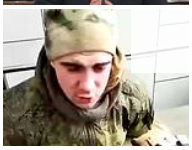
Boebert heckles Biden at SOTU saying, 'you put them in, 13 of them'

Biden mixes up 'Ukrainian' with 'Iranian' during SOTU speech



'We were lied to': Captured Russian soldiers say they don't want war

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Ukrainian firefighters extinguish the remains of an Air Force transpo

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Joe Biden announced more sanctions against Russia but warned the conflict could last for many months and resisted calls to send in US troops to Ukraine, saying he has no plans to speak to Vladimir Putin

Russian helicopter downed in the Hostomel region

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0:00 / 0:29

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A Russian Ka-52 helicopter gunship is seen in the field after a forced landing Kyiv, Ukraine

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In the area of Glukhova, the Ukrainian military engaged a armoured column of 15 T-72 tanks with American Javelin missiles

Devastating moment Russian missile strikes Ivano-Frankivsk Airport

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0:00 / 0:34

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A wounded woman is seen as airstrike damages an apartment complex outside of Kharkiv, Ukraine

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Ukrainian security forces accompany a wounded man after an airstrike hit an apartment complex in Chuhuiv, Kharkiv

'Thank God, no one died': Donetsk street wrecked after mortar fire

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Damage to an apartment building in Chuhuiv, Kharkiv region, is seen in footage released by the Ukrainian national guard

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Chuhuiv military airfield in Kharkiv outskirts burns

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A man throws debris from a burning barn following Russian shelling outside outside Mariupol

Russia launch attack overnight on Ukraine in full scale invasion

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Smoke rises over Chuhuiv military airfield in eastern Ukraine after a

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Russian soldiers raise a flag over the Kakhovka Hydroelectric plant after attacking it with helicopters

Missile shell hits passerby cyclist in Ukraine's Cherkassy region

0:00 / 0:35

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CCTV cameras at Belarusian-Ukrainian checkpoint Senkovka-Veselovka capture at least four T-72B tanks, at least eight MT-LB tractors, and a Ural truck crossing the border

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Two Russian troops - believed to be Rafik Rakhmankulov, 19 (left) and Mgomd Mgomdov, 26, from Kizilyurt (right) - have been captured by Ukrainian forces in the country's east

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Weapons and knives seized from two Russian soldiers captured by Ukrainian units fighting around Kharkiv

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People use a basement of a school as a shelter for the next night in Kiev

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Children stand by broken windows after attacks in Yasinovataya as Ukrainians rush into hiding from Russian shelling

Ukrainian President Zelensky says new 'Iron Curtain is falling'

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Boebert heckles Biden at SOTU saying, 'you put them in, 13 of them'

Biden mixes up 'Ukrainian' with 'Iranian' during SOTU speech

0:00 / 1:42

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The crew of a Russian BMP fighting vehicle are seen face-down with jackets pulled over their heads (left) after being captured by Ukrainian forces (their vehicle is pictured, right)

War in Ukraine begins: Moment Russian troops cross the border

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0:00 / 1:29

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Vladimir Putin speaks to oligarchs at the Kremlin, demanding 'solidarity' from them over the attack on Ukraine - as Russian markets tank and the West prepares to cut the country off economically

Russian oligarchs line up to listen to Vladimir Putin speak as the Russian economy is hit by his decision to go to war

Ukrainian PM confirms Chernobyl power plant captured by Russian

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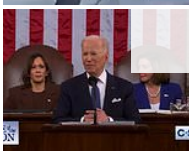

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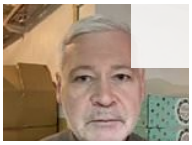
Mayor of Kharkiv claims Russian shelling burnt a family alive in their car



It came after the Russian strongman gave an extraordinary address to the Russian nation - broadcast in the early hours during a UN meeting aimed at avoiding war - in which he declared a 'special military operation' to 'de-militarise' and 'de-Nazify' Ukraine in what amounted to a outright declaration of war. The video appeared to have been pre-recorded, around the same time as Putin's Monday address recognising Donbass as independent.

Putin also issued a chilling warning to any country thinking of coming to Ukraine's aid, vowing 'consequences greater than any you have faced in history'. 'I hope I have been heard,' he said.

The mood on the ground in Ukraine was mixed. Some showed incredible resolve - heading to work via train and road even as the bombs dropped. Elderly women in the city of Kharkiv, under heavy attack, gathered in the street to pray. But for others, the sight of Russian attack was too much. Highways out of Kiev clogged with cars as people fled, while refugees began crossing the borders into Poland and Slovakia.

One Ukrainian woman voiced the outrage of her nation today as she confronted heavily armed Russian soldiers and demanded to know what they were doing in her country.

The woman, wearing a headscarf, shouted at two of the invaders: 'What the f*** are you doing in our land?' while

World leaders react to Russia's war on Ukraine

RUSSIA PRESIDENT VLADIMIR PUTIN

'I have decided to conduct a special military operation... to protect people who have been subjected to bullying and genocide... for the last eight years.

'And for this we will strive for the demilitarisation and denazification of Ukraine. And to bring to court those who committed numerous bloody crimes against civilians, including against citizens of the Russian Federation.'

UKRAINIAN PRESIDENT VOLODYMYR ZELINSKIY

'Russia treacherously attacked our state in the morning, as Nazi Germany did in the WW2 years.

'As of today, our countries are on different sides of world history. Russia has embarked on a path of evil, but

one of the embarrassed soldiers in Henichesk, a port city on the sea of Azov, tried to calm her.

She walked away, then called back: 'You should put sunflower seeds in your pockets so that they will grow on Ukranian land after you die.'

Speaking in an emergency White House press conference, Biden today called Putin a 'pariah' on the international stage and called on the West to stand up to the 'bully'.

But he insisted the US would not be helping Ukraine with troops.

He said: 'Our forces are not, and will not be, engaged in the conflict with Russia in Ukraine. Our forces are not going to Europe to fight in Ukraine, but to defend our Nato allies and reassure those allies in the east.

'When the history of this era is written, Putin's choice to make a totally unjustifiable war on Ukraine will have left Russia weaker and the rest of the world stronger.

'He has much larger ambitions than Ukraine. He wants to, in fact, re-establish the former Soviet Union. That's what this is about.'

Meanwhile protesters in Moscow voiced their support for Ukraine as they chanted 'There is no war' outside Pushkinskaya Metro station in the Russian capital.

The invasion - a naked attempt to redraw the map of Europe by force - marks the most concerted attempt to up-end world order since the end of the Cold War, and risks sparking the bloodiest conflict in Europe since the end of the Second World War.

Underlining the gravity of the moment, Ukrainian Interior Ministry advisor Anton Herashchenko said: 'Starting today, the world has a new geopolitical reality. Either Ukraine and the world will stop the new Hitler now, or there will be a Third World War.'

Western leaders lined up to condemn Russia's actions in the early hours, with security councils convened the world over to mount a response. Heavy sanctions are expected to follow, along with more shipments of military equipment to Ukraine - provided they can find a route in.

'We have no plans to send NATO troops in Ukraine. What we do is defensive.'

U.S PRESIDENT JOE BIDEN

'President Putin has chosen a premeditated war that will bring a catastrophic loss of life and human suffering...

'I will be meeting with the leaders of the G7, and the United States and our allies and partners will be imposing severe sanctions on Russia.'

EUROPEAN COMMISSION PRESIDENT URSULA VON DER LEYEN

'President Putin is responsible for bringing war back to Europe...

'We will target strategic sectors of the Russian economy by blocking their access to key technologies and markets. We will weaken Russia's economic base and its capacity to modernise.'

'In addition, we will freeze Russian assets in the EU and stop the access of Russian banks to the European financial market.'

EUROPEAN COMMISSION FOREIGN POLICY CHIEF JOSEP BORRELL

'These are among the darkest hours of Europe since the Second World War.

'The EU will respond in the strongest possible terms and agree on the harshest package of sanctions we have ever implemented.'

GERMAN CHANCELLOR OLAF SCHOLZ

'Putin is bringing suffering and destruction to his direct neighbours, he is violating the sovereignty and borders of Ukraine.

'He is endangering the lives of countless innocent people (and)... the peace order on our continent. For all that there is no justification. This is Putin's war.'

FRENCH PRESIDENT EMMANUEL MACRON

'France strongly condemns the decision of Russia to

But NATO and the US have made it clear that no troops will be sent, leaving Ukraine's military - far the inferior of Russia - to hold off the assault alone. Few expect it to emerge victorious from what is almost certain to be a prolonged, bloody, and vicious war.

NATO is expected to focus its efforts on stopping the war from spilling over into neighbouring countries. Poland, a member of the alliance, shares an extensive land border with Ukraine. The Baltic states - Estonia, Latvia and Lithuania, also NATO members - will now fear a Russian assault.

The alliance began moving its forces early Thursday, putting 100 warplanes on high alert in Europe whole moving more troops to the Baltics.

Moldova, where some Russian ground troops are already based, is also at risk of falling to Putin. From there, he could strike out at Romania - another former Soviet state.

Unconfirmed reports said that Russian forces had destroyed or rendered unusable the Ukrainian navy, and struck Boryspil Airport in Kiev. Access to the Black Sea and Azov Sea was cut off.

President Joe Biden will address the nation at noon on Thursday, and on Wednesday night he condemned Russia's 'unprovoked and unjustified attack.' He was speaking to Ukraine's president.

Biden said in a statement: 'President Putin has chosen a premeditated war that will bring a catastrophic loss of life and human suffering.

'Russia alone is responsible for the death and destruction this attack will bring, and the United States and its Allies and partners will respond in a united and decisive way. The world will hold Russia accountable.'

Biden said he will be monitoring the situation from Washington, DC, and will continue to get regular updates from his national security team.

Putin justified it all in a televised address, asserting that the attack was needed to protect civilians in eastern Ukraine - a false claim the U.S. had predicted he would make as a pretext for an invasion.

He accused the U.S. and its allies of ignoring Russia's demands to prevent Ukraine from joining NATO and for

CHINESE FOREIGN MINISTRY SPOKESPERSON HUA CHUNYING

'You are using a typical Western media question method of using the word invasion.

'China is closely monitoring the latest situation. We call on all sides to exercise restraint to prevent the situation from getting out of control.'

GERMAN ARMY CHIEF LIEUTENANT GENERAL ALFONS MAIS

'In my 41th year of peace-time service, I would not have thought that I would have to experience a war.

'And the Bundeswehr, the army which I have the honour to command, is standing there more or less empty-handed. The options we can offer the government in support of the (NATO)alliance are extremely limited...

'We have all seen it coming but were not able to get through with our arguments to draw the consequences after (Russia's) annexation of Crimea. This does not feel good. I am fed up with it.'

TURKISH FOREIGN MINISTRY

'This attack is a grave violation of international law and poses a serious threat to the security of our region and the world.

'We call on the Russian Federation to immediately end this unjust and unlawful act.'

HUNGARIAN PRIME MINISTER VIKTOR ORBAN

'With our EU and NATO allies, we condemn Russia's military attack.'

PORTUGUESE PRIME MINISTER ANTONIO COSTA

'The answer to this crisis should be a diplomatic solution... NATO will not intervene or act in Ukraine.

'Ukrainian citizens who have family, friends and acquaintances here are welcome in Portugal.'

ISRAELI FOREIGN MINISTER YAIR LAPID

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security guarantees. He also claimed that Russia does not intend to occupy Ukraine but will move to 'demilitarize' it and bring those who committed crimes to justice.

Biden in a written statement condemned the 'unprovoked and unjustified attack,' and he promised that the U.S. and its allies would 'hold Russia accountable.' The president said he planned to speak to Americans on Thursday after a meeting of the Group of Seven leaders. More sanctions against Russia were expected to be announced Thursday.

Ukraine's Foreign Minister Dmytro Kuleba described the assault as a 'full-scale invasion' and said Ukraine will 'defend itself and will win. The world can and must stop Putin. The time to act is now.'

In the capital, Kyiv Mayor Vitaly Klitschko advised residents to stay home unless they are involved in critical work and urged them to prepare go-bags with necessities and documents if they need to evacuate. An Associated Press photographer in Mariupol reported hearing explosions and seeing dozens of people with suitcases heading for their cars to leave the city.

has seized power in Russia.'

EUROPEAN CENTRAL BANK POLICYMAKER YANNIS STOURNARAS

'In my view it is going to have a short-term inflationary effect â that is prices will increase due to higher energy costs.

'But in the medium to long term I think that the consequences will be deflationary through adverse trade effects.'

'We are facing a war and horror. What could be worse?' 64-year-old Liudmila Gireyeva said in Kyiv. She planned to head to the western city of Lviv and then to try to move to Poland to join her daughter. Putin 'will be damned by history, and Ukrainians are damning him.'

The Russian claims about knocking out Ukrainian air defenses and Ukrainian claims to have shot down several Russian aircraft could not immediately be verified. The Ukrainian air defense system and air force date back to the Soviet era and are dwarfed by Russia's massive air power and its inventory of precision weapons.

The Russian Defense Ministry said it was not targeting cities, but using precision weapons and claimed that 'there is no threat to civilian population.'

Anton Gerashchenko, an adviser to Ukraine's interior minister, said on Facebook that the Russian military had launched missile strikes on Ukrainian military command facilities, air bases and military depots in Kyiv, Kharkiv and Dnipro.

Biden announced he will join G7 counterparts on Thursday morning, and will address the country later on Thursday to 'announce the further consequences the United S
Russia.'

'We will also coordinate with our NATO Allies to ensure a stron
against the Alliance. Tonight, Jill and I are praying for the brav
added.

Boris Johnson, the British prime minister, tweeted early on Thu
Ukraine and I have spoken to President Zelenskyy to discuss n

bloodshed and destruction by launching this unprovoked attack on Ukraine. The UK and our allies will respond decisively.'

Transport Secretary Grant Shapps has also signed restrictions prohibiting all scheduled Russian airlines from entering UK airspace or touching down on British soil.

Putin in his speech on Thursday told other countries not to get involved.

'To anyone who would consider interfering from the outside - if you do, you will face consequences greater than any you have faced in history,' he said in the television broadcast around 6am Moscow time.

The consequences of the conflict and resulting sanctions on Russia could reverberate throughout the world, upending geopolitical dynamics in Europe as well as affecting energy supplies in Europe and jolting global financial markets.

Armoured vehicles from annexed Crimea are seen heading for Ukraine

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Pakistan's Prime Minister Imran Khan (left) sits down for a 'working lunch' with Vladimir Putin at the Kremlin, having refused to call off a visit to Russia despite the outbreak of war

Vladimir Putin meets Pakistani PM after launching invasion on Ukraine

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0:00 / 0:19

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Ukrainian President Volodymyr Zelenskiy chairs an urgent meeting with the leadership of the government, representatives of the defence sector and the economic bloc, in Kiev

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Ukrainian servicemen get ready to repel an attack in Ukraine's Lugansk

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View gallery

Ukrainian servicemen get ready to repel an attack in Ukraine's Lugansk region

Military trucks seen heading towards Crimea as Russia invade Ukraine

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0:00 / 0:12

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Ukrainian servicemen get ready to repel an attack in Ukraine's Lugansk region

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Ukrainian tanks are seen rolling into the port city of Mariupol, in eastern Ukraine, after Putin declared war

Russian paratroopers parachute into Ukraine's second largest city

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0:00 / 0:13

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Ukrainian troops are seen on the top of a tank heading into the city of Mariupol, near the occupied Donbass

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Ukrainian soldiers ride in a military vehicle in Mariupol, Ukraine

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Military vehicles are seen on a street on the outskirts of the separatist-controlled city of Donetsk, Ukraine

Terrifying moment air raid sirens are sounded across Ukraine

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0:00 / 0:30

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Servicemen ride on an armoured vehicle with the letter 'Z' on it in the town of Armyansk, Crimea

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A military vehicle leaves the town of Armyansk, northern Crimea

Fire at Mariupol International Airport in Ukraine after bombing

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A column of army trucks passes a police post in the town of Armyansk, northern Crimea

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Ukrainian military track burns at an air defence base in the aftermath of an apparent Russian strike in Mariupol, Ukraine

Video that's being shared on social media showing missile strike in M

Huge cloud of orange smoke fills Dnipro skyline near Dnieper River

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Black smoke rises from a military airport in Chuguyev near Kharkiv

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Vladimir Putin is pictured in the early hours of Thursday morning declaring war on Ukraine, in what he termed a 'special military operation'

Alexander Lukashenko, dictatorial ruler of Belarus, is shown speakir reportedly joined in the attack on Ukraine - though he denies it

Ukrainians rush to flee country to Slovakia after Russia decla

Watch the full video

Asian stock markets plunged and oil prices surged as the attack began. Earlier, Wall Street's benchmark S&P 500 index fell 1.8% to an eight-month low after the Kremlin said rebels in eastern Ukraine asked for military assistance.

Anticipating international condemnation and countermeasures, Putin issued a stark warning to other countries not to meddle, saying, 'whoever tries to impede us, let alone create threats for our country and its people, must know that the Russian response will be immediate and lead to the consequences you have never seen in history.'

Putin urged Ukrainian servicemen to 'immediately put down arms and go home.'

In a stark reminder of Russia's nuclear power, Putin warned that 'no one should have any doubts that a direct attack on our country will lead to the destruction and horrible consequences for any potential aggressor.' He emphasized that Russia is 'one of the most potent nuclear powers and also has a certain edge in a range of state-of-the-art weapons.'

Though the U.S. on Tuesday announced the repositioning of forces around the Baltics, Biden has said he will not send in troops to fight Russia.

'An explosion made the ground beneath our feet tremble': NICK CRAVEN reports from Kiev

Ukrainians woke to the sound of missiles and air strikes as their worst fears were realised, with explosions in Kiev causing the ground to tremble and windows shake.

All across the country people ran to basement bomb shelters as Vladimir Putin ordered his troops to invade.

Shortly after 5am the crumps of explosions shook the windows of my hotel room as myself and MailOnline photographer Simon Ashton donned the body armour and helmets that have weighed us down, unused in their bag for the last month.

Putin announced the military operation after the Kremlin said rebels in eastern Ukraine asked Russia for military assistance to help fend off Ukrainian 'aggression,' an announcement that the White House said was a 'false flag' operation by Moscow to offer up a pretext for an invasion.

Putin's announcement came just hours after the Ukrainian president rejected Moscow's claims that his country poses a threat to Russia and made a passionate, last-minute plea for peace.

'The people of Ukraine and the government of Ukraine want peace,' Zelenskyy said in an emotional overnight address, speaking in Russian in a direct appeal to Russian citizens. 'But if we come under attack, if we face an attempt to take away our country, our freedom, our lives and lives of our children, we will defend ourselves. When you attack us, you will see our faces, not our backs.'

Zelenskyy said he asked to arrange a call with Putin late Wednesday, but the Kremlin did not respond.

In an apparent reference to Putin's move to authorize the deployment of the Russian military to 'maintain peace' in eastern Ukraine, Zelensky warned that 'this step could mark the start of a big war on the European continent.'

'Any provocation, any spark could trigger a blaze that will destroy everything,' he said.

He challenged the Russian propaganda claims, saying that 'you are told that this blaze will bring freedom to the people of Ukraine, but the Ukrainian people are free.'

At an emergency meeting of the U.N. Security Council called by Ukraine because of the imminent threat of a Russian invasion, members still unaware of Putin's announcement appealed to him to stop an attack. U.N. Secretary-General Antonio Guterres opened the meeting, just before the announcement, telling Putin: 'Stop your troops from attacking Ukraine. Give peace a chance. Too many people have already died.'

NATO Secretary-General Jen Stoltenberg issued a statement condemning 'Russia's reckless and unprovoked attack on Ukraine, which puts at risk countless civilian lives. Once again, despite our repeated warnings and tireless efforts to engage in

At 6.36am there was by far the loudest explosion from our perspective, believed to be an air strike on a military airfield near Kyiv, which made the ground beneath our feet tremble.

By dawn there was an eerie calm as an overcast drizzly day began, broken only by the cheerful chimes of the bells of St Michael's golden domed Monastery across the square from the hotel at 7am.

At 7.05am the first air raid sirens rang out all across the city, though no blitz followed in the central area at least.

Surreally, even as the dreaded noise of the sirens rent the air, a steady stream of headlights could be seen driving into the city as commuters came in to start the day.

But the calm wasn't to last long as the full extent of the Russian invasion began to reveal itself, with troops attacking the border on three sides and air strikes right across the country, even as far west as Lviv, near the Polish border.

By 8am local time, queues of people were seen at bank ATMs in the city, perhaps the first sign of panic, following the introduction of a state of emergency across the country from midnight last night.

Police and soldiers stood on many of the street corners to keep order.

Long lines also formed at gas stations around the city, but with so many places being pounded from the air, it wasn't obvious where would be the safest place to flee to.

Having said that, although the streets were noticeably quieter than usual as the working day began, people were mostly calmly going about their business, perhaps still coming to terms with what might be next.

When I first arrived in this country a month ago, few Ukrainians took Putin's sabre-rattling seriously.

Most admitted that it was possible he might move into the Donbas to annexe the pro-Russian breakaway republics of Luhansk and Donetsk, but very few believed

diplomacy, Russia has chosen the path of aggression against a sovereign and independent country.'

European Council President Charles Michel and European Commission President Ursula von der Leyen promised to hold the Kremlin accountable.

An explosion lights up the night sky over Kiev in the early hours of Th
from north, south and east with bombs, cruise missiles and rockets a

+119
View gallery

A blast in Sumy, eastern Ukraine, strikes what appears to be an arms depot which exploded, lighting up the night sky

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Russian military tanks and armored vehicles advance in Donetsk, Ukraine

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An explosion is seen in the early hours of Thursday in the Ukrainian city of Kharkiv

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A huge explosion lights up the night sky in Sumy, eastern Ukraine, after a Russian airstrike hit what appears to be an ammo dump, while smoke and flames are also seen rising over Kherson, in the south near Crimea

Fleet of attack helicopters pounding military airport close to Kiev

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Checkpoint of the State Border Guard Service of Ukraine in Kyiv region was shelled

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The ruins of a state border guard service checkpoint in the Kyiv region is seen after it was struck

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Flame and smoke rise from the debris of a private house in the aftermath of Russian shelling outside Kyiv, Ukrain

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A Ukrainian infantry combat vehicle BMP-2 is seen standing guard on the outskirts of Kyiv

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Debris and rubble are seen at the site where a missile landed in the street in Kiev

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Police officers inspect the remains of a missile that landed in the street in Kiev

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Ukrainian firefighters arrive to rescue civilians after an airstrike hit an apartment complex in Chuhuiv, Kharkiv

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Ukrainian military helicopter flies over a gas station, after Russian President Vladimir Putin authorized a military operation

A Russian tank is seen parked beside a road in Donetsk, the area of eastern Ukraine occupied by pro-Russian rebels

Disturbing rumble of explosions heard in Kharkiv City

Watch the full video

'In these dark hours, our thoughts are with Ukraine and the innocent women, men and children as they face this unprovoked attack and fear for their lives,' they said on Twitter.

Even before Putin's announcement, dozens of nations imposed sanctions on Russia, further squeezing Russian oligarchs and banks out of international markets.

The Russian Foreign Ministry has shrugged off the sanctions, saying that 'Russia has proven that, with all the costs of the sanctions, it is able to minimize the damage.'

The threat of war has already shredded Ukraine's economy and raised the specter of massive casualties, energy shortages across Europe and global economic chaos.

Across Ukraine, cruise and ballistic missiles were destroying military infrastructure and strategically important facilities, according to unofficial Russian sources.

CNN's correspondent reporting live as Kiev attacked

CNN's correspondent in Kiev was live on air on Thursday morning as Russia's attack was launched.

'I just heard a big bang right here behind me. I've never heard anything like it,' said Matthew Chance, CNN's senior international correspondent.

Chance quickly put on his flak jacket and helmet while

Mariupol, on the Black Sea 50 miles from the Russian border, appeared to be under fierce attack. Taking this strategic location would give the Donbas republics access to the sea.

The moment Ukraine and the rest of Europe had dreaded for months finally came shortly after 4.35am local time when huge explosions were heard in Kiev and other cities across the country.

Terrified citizens rushed to bomb shelters, though no air raid warnings sounded in the capital – only the frequent muffled crump of missile or air strikes breaking through the pre-dawn stillness.

In Kiev, people were sheltering in basements as the sounds of distant explosions became a constant backdrop.

Within an hour Russians special force and airborne troops were reported to be on the ground at Kiev's Boryspil Airport, amid fierce fighting.

A woman in the Ukrainian capital said: 'I was woken by a friend.

'I am in the centre of Kiev.

'I hear the sound of distant explosions and ambulance sirens.'

At 7.05am the first air raid sirens were heard in central Kiev.

A **CNN** reporter in Kiev reported hearing blasts live on air in the early hours of Thursday morning.

'I just heard a big bang right here behind me. I've never heard anything like it,' said Matthew Chance, senior international correspondent for the network.

'I don't know if that's what's occurring now but it's a remarkable coincidence that the explosions come just minutes after Putin gave his speech,' Chance explained.

'This is the first time we've heard anything. It has been absolutely silent. This is the first time. It has to be more than just a coincidence.

'I think it's safe where I am. I have a flak jacket,' Chance remarked before ducking down to put on his protective gear.

White House outraged by reports of Chernobyl hostages says Psaki

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MORE VIDEOS

Shocking moment Chicago father-of-two is killed in broad daylight

0:00 / 0:36

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Missile strike in Ivano Frankivsk, in Ukraine's west, as smoke and flames rise into the sky

Ukraine: port of Ochakiv (Mykolaiv region) is on fire

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Fire is seen coming out of a military installation near the airport in Mariupol, southern Ukraine

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Ukrainian army soldier are seen next to multiple launch missile systems in Kharkiv, eastern Ukraine

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Ukrainian army soldiers stand next to multiple launch missile systems near Kharkiv, which was reportedly under heavy Russian attack on Thursday morning

'Barbaric': Boris Johnson addresses the nation on the war in Ukraine

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0:00 / 4:09

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Ukrainian army soldiers are seen on an armoured vehicle in the Kharkiv region

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Smoke rise from an air defense base in the aftermath of an apparent Russian strike in Mariupol, Ukraine

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Damaged radar arrays and other equipment is seen at Ukrainian military facility outside Mariupol, Ukraine

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People stand outside a destroyed building after bombings on the eastern Ukraine town of Chuguiv

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A local mining equipment repair plant stands damaged by shellfire in Gorlovka

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View gallery

A local man stands before a house damaged by shellfire in Gorlovka

Chance said that he heard between seven and eight explosions and quickly put on his flak jacket and headgear while he continued to report from a balcony in the Ukrainian capital.

'There are big explosions taking place.

'I can't see them or explain what they are.

'But I will tell you the U.S has warned the Ukrainian authorities there could be air strikes and ground attacks as well around the country, including the capital.

'I don't know if that's what's occurring now but it's a remarkable coincidence that the explosions come just minutes after Putin gave his speech,' Chance explained.

'This is the first time we've heard anything. It has been absolutely silent.

'This is the first time. It has to be more than just a coincidence.

Donald Trump claims that the invasion was sparked by 'election fraud' in 2020

Donald Trump, speaking to Fox's Laura Ingraham on Wednesday night as the **Kremlin's 'special military operation' began**, claimed that the so-called 'Russia hoax' ruined his good relationships with both Russian President **Vladimir Putin** and Chinese President Xi, arguing he kept the two apart.

'I think it's safe where I am. I have a flak jacket,' Chance remarked, before ducking down to put on his protective gear.

He suggested that the blasts he heard in the Ukrainian capital were still some distance away from the center.

'It was so quiet in Ukraine tonight up until those explosions,' Chance explained.

The blasts came within minutes of Putin saying Russia would conduct a military operation in eastern Ukraine.

Explosions could also be heard from Ukraine in the Russian city of Belgorod.

Putin told Russians: 'I have decided to conduct a special military operation.

'Russia cannot exist with a constant threat emanating from the territory of Ukraine.

'You and I have been left with no opportunity to protect our people other than the one we use today.'

It comes after explosions were also heard near the Ukrainian port city of Mariupol, as fears mounted that shelling is underway.

Residents in the city, which is located in south eastern **Ukraine**, have been woken up at 3.30am by blasts 30 miles from the Russian border.

Video footage appeared to show clouds of smoke rising up into the night sky near Mariupol, but it was unconfirmed whether it was as a result of shelling.

President Xi of China, other than the fact that I was tariffing and taxing the hell out of him.

'As a young man growing up, I always heard that the worst thing that could happen is drive those two countries together.

'It really started with Obama and energy. He drove them together because one needed the energy and the other needed the money,' Trump added.

'He drove them together and Biden - I kept them apart - and Biden now it's a great love fest and that's a very bad thing and I think you can probably add Iran into it too.'

Earlier in the interview, in which Trump spoke over the phone with Ingraham, Trump bemoaned that this was happening at all.

'This should have never happened. This would not have happened during my administration.

'In fact, some people are saying why didn't this take place over the last four years?'

Putin earlier this week said he wanted to take the major Azov Sea Port of Mariupol, which handles 50 percent Ukraine's steel and mineral exports.

NATO Secretary General Jens Stoltenberg said Russia's actions were a 'grave breach of international law' and that allies would meet to address the 'renewed aggression'.

He said on Twitter: 'I strongly condemn #Russia's reckless attack on #Ukraine, which puts at risk countless civilian lives.

'This is a grave breach of international law & a serious threat t
address Russia's renewed aggression.'

The British foreign secretary Liz Truss tweeted her condemnat

'I strongly condemn the appalling, unprovoked attack Preside
said.

Live stream footage said to show explosions in Mariupol, Ukraine

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Cars jam the highway heading out of Kiev, the capital of Ukraine, aft

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Cars block the highway out of Kiev following pre-offensive missile strikes of the Russian armed forces and Belarus

Traffic jams are seen as people leave the city of Kyiv, Ukraine

Russian tanks head towards hydroelectric power plant in Ukraine

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0:00 / 0:45

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People take shelter in Vokzalna metro station in Kiev

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People line up to withdraw money at a cash dispenser in Kiev

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People queue at an ATM in Lviv, western Ukraine, after Russia unleashed an all-out attack on the country

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View gallery

Ukrainians shop for weapons in the capital Kiev after Zelesnky promised a weapon to whoever wanted one

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View gallery

Cars drive across a field to leave the city of Kharkiv, in eastern Ukraine, after it came under heavy attack

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A family arrives at the Polish border crossing after fleeing violence in Ukraine, in Medyka

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Pakistan's Prime Minister Imran Khan attends a wreath-laying ceremony in Moscow as he prepares to sit down for talks with Vladimir Putin in the Kremlin today

Footage shows smoke supposedly rising on the skyline after the blas

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Boris Johnson is briefed by the Chief of the Defence Staff Admiral Sir Tony Radakin at the Ministry of Defence on the situation in Ukraine on Tuesday

Zelensky to Russian people: 'You will see our faces, not our backs'

Watch the full video

0:00 / 3:41

'We stand with Ukraine and we will work with our international partners to respond to this terrible act of aggression.'

The explosions come just hours after the U.S. warned the Ukrainian government that Putin's troops are 'ready to go now' with an invasion of Ukraine, with 80 percent of Russian soldiers now assembled around the country in attack positions.

U.S. Secretary of State Anthony Blinken issued a further stark warning and said, hours before the invasion, that he believed **Russia** would invade before the night is over.

Russia on Wednesday afternoon issued a notice to airmen (NOTAM) which closed the airspace along its northeastern border with Ukraine to all civilian air traffic.

Ukraine later said early on Thursday it had restricted civilian flights in its airspace due to 'potential hazard'.

Ukraine's President Volodymyr Zelenskyy vowed that the Ukrainian people will 'fight back' if **Putin** threatens their freedom and lives by launching a full-scale invasion.

President Zelenskyy made an emotional address to his nation after Moscow-backed rebel leaders in eastern Ukraine asked Putin for military assistance in fending off Ukrainian 'aggression'.

In an emotional televised address on Wednesday night, President Zelenskyy said: 'The people of Ukraine and the government of Ukraine want peace.

'But if we come under attack, if we face an attempt to take away our country, our freedom, our lives and lives of our children, we will defend ourselves.

'When you attack us, you will see our faces, not our backs.'

The Ukrainian president said he had tried to call Putin this evening, but there was 'no answer, only silence', adding that Moscow now has around 200,000 soldiers by Ukraine's borders.

The United Nations Security Council quickly scheduled an emergency meeting Wednesday night - the second in three days - at Ukraine's request.

Ukrainian Foreign Minister Dmytro Kuleba called the separatists' request 'a further escalation of the security situation.'

Earlier on Wednesday, Ukraine was placed on a war footing: A state of emergency was declared and approved by parliament, 200,000 military reservists called up, border zones were restricted and three million Ukrainians told to leave Russia, with Kiev acknowledging for the first time that an attack could now take place anywhere, at any time.

Biden on Wednesday warned President Zelenskyy of an 'immi
just hours after Ukraine was hit by a 'massive' cyberattack targ

But Blinken cut that time frame of a Russian invasion drasticall
to invade Ukraine before the night was over.

U.S. intelligence chiefs knew Kharkiv, Ukraine's second-largest
Russian invasion as it is close to the Ukrainian-Russian border.

On Wednesday night, a huge military convoy of more than 100 trucks with soldiers were heading in the direction of the city.

IN FULL: Putin's declaration of war on Ukraine

Dear citizens of Russia! Dear friends!

Today, I again consider it necessary to return to the tragic events taking place in the Donbass and the key issues of ensuring the security of Russia itself.

Let me start with what I said in my address of February 21 this year. We are talking about what causes us particular concern and anxiety, about those fundamental threats that year after year, step by step, are rudely and unceremoniously created by irresponsible politicians in the West in relation to our country. I mean the expansion of the NATO bloc to the east, bringing its military infrastructure closer to Russian borders.

It is well known that for 30 years we have persistently and patiently tried to reach an agreement with the leading NATO countries on the principles of equal and indivisible security in Europe. In response to our proposals, we constantly faced either cynical deception and lies, or attempts to pressure and blackmail, while the North Atlantic Alliance, in the meantime, despite all our protests and concerns, is steadily expanding. The military machine is moving and, I repeat, is coming close to our borders.

Why is all this happening? Where does this impudent manner of speaking from the position of one's own exclusivity, infallibility and permissiveness come from? Where does the disdainful, disdainful attitude towards our interests and absolutely legitimate demands come from?

The answer is clear, everything is clear and obvious. The Soviet Union in the late 80s of the last century weakened, and then completely collapsed. The whole course of events that took place then is a good lesson for us today as well; it convincingly showed that the paralysis of power and will is the first step towards complete degradation and oblivion. As soon as we lost confidence in ourselves for some time, and that's it, the balance of power in the world turned out to be disturbed.

This has led to the fact that the previous treaties and agreements are no longer in effect. Persuasion and requests do not help. Everything that does not suit the hegemon, those in power, is declared archaic, obsolete, unnecessary. And vice versa: everything that seems beneficial to them is presented as the ultimate truth, pushed through at any cost, boorishly, by all means. Dissenters are broken through the knee.

What I am talking about now concerns not only Russia and not only us. This applies to the entire system of international relations, and sometimes even to the US allies themselves. After the collapse of the USSR, the redivision of the world actually began, and the norms of international law that had developed by that time - and the key, basic ones were adopted at the end of the Second World War and largely consolidated its results - began to interfere with those who declared themselves the winner in the Cold War .

Of course, in practical life, in international relations, in the rules for their regulation, it was necessary to take into account changes in the situation in the world and the balance of power itself. However, this should have been done professionally, smoothly, patiently, taking into account and respecting the interests of all countries and understanding our responsibility. But no - a state of euphoria from absolute superiority, a kind of modern form of absolutism, and even against the background of a low level of general culture and arrogance of thos
decisions that were beneficial only for themselves. The situation b

You don't have to look far for examples. First, without any sanction
bloody military operation against Belgrade, using aircraft and miss
continuous bombing of civilian cities, on life-supporting infrastruc
Western colleagues do not like to remember those events, and wh
of international law, but to the circumstances that they interpret a

Then came the turn of Iraq, Libya, Syria. The illegitimate use of mil
of the UN Security Council on the Libyan issue led to the complete

hotbed of international terrorism, to the fact that the country plunged into a humanitarian catastrophe that has not stopped for many years. civil war. The tragedy, which doomed hundreds of thousands, millions of people not only in Libya, but throughout this region, gave rise to a massive migration exodus from North Africa and the Middle East to Europe.

A similar fate was prepared for Syria. The fighting of the Western coalition on the territory of this country without the consent of the Syrian government and the sanction of the UN Security Council is nothing but aggression, intervention.

However, a special place in this series is occupied, of course, by the invasion of Iraq, also without any legal grounds. As a pretext, they chose reliable information allegedly available to the United States about the presence of weapons of mass destruction in Iraq. As proof of this, publicly, in front of the eyes of the whole world, the US Secretary of State shook some kind of test tube with white powder, assuring everyone that this is the chemical weapon being developed in Iraq. And then it turned out that all this was a hoax, a bluff: there are no chemical weapons in Iraq. Unbelievable, surprising, but the fact remains. There were lies at the highest state level and from the high rostrum of the UN. And as a result - huge casualties, destruction, an incredible surge of terrorism.

In general, one gets the impression that practically everywhere, in many regions of the world, where the West comes to establish its own order, the result is bloody, unhealed wounds, ulcers of international terrorism and extremism. All that I have said is the most egregious, but by no means the only examples of disregard for international law.

In this series, and promises to our country not to expand NATO by one inch to the east. I repeat - they deceived me, but in popular terms, they simply threw it away. Yes, you can often hear that politics is a dirty business. Perhaps, but not to the same extent, not to the same extent. After all, such cheating behavior contradicts not only the principles of international relations, but above all the generally recognized norms of morality and morality. Where is justice and truth here? Just a bunch of lies and hypocrisy.

By the way, American politicians, political scientists and journalists themselves write and talk about the fact that a real 'empire of lies' has been created inside the United States in recent years. It's hard to disagree with that - it's true. But do not be modest: the United States is still a great country, a system-forming power. All her satellites not only resignedly and dutifully assent, sing along to her for any reason, but also copy her behavior, enthusiastically accept the rules he proposes. Therefore, with good reason, we can confidently say that the entire so-called Western bloc, formed by the United States in its own image and likeness, all of it is the very 'empire of lies'.

As for our country, after the collapse of the USSR, with all the unprecedented openness of the new modern Russia, the readiness to work honestly with the United States and other Western partners, and in the conditions of virtually unilateral disarmament, they immediately tried to squeeze us, finish off and destroy us completely. This is exactly what happened in the 90s, in the early 2000s, when the so-called collective West most actively supported separatism and mercenary gangs in southern Russia. What sacrifices, what losses did all this cost us then, what trials did we have to go through before we finally broke the back of international terrorism in the Caucasus. We remember this and will never forget.

Yes, in fact, until recently, attempts have not stopped to use us in their own interests, destroy our traditional values and impose on us their pseudo-values that would corrode us, our people from the inside, those attitudes that they are already aggressively planting in their countries and which directly lead to degradation and degeneration, because they contradict the very nature of man. It won't happen, no one has ever done it. It won't work now either.

Despite everything, in December 2021, we nevertheless once again made an attempt to agree with the United States and its allies on the principles of ensuring security in Europe and on the non-expansion of NATO. Everything is in vain. The US position does not change. They do not consider it necessary to negotiate with Russia on this key issue for us, pursuing their own goals, they neglect our interests.

And of course, in this situation, we have a question: what to do ne
1940s and early 1941s the Soviet Union tried in every possible way
end, among other things, he tried literally to the last not to provok
the most necessary, obvious actions to prepare for repelling an ine
taken in the end were catastrophically belated.

As a result, the country was not ready to fully meet the invasion of
22, 1941 without declaring war. The enemy was stopped and then
the aggressor on the eve of the Great Patriotic War turned out to b

months of hostilities, we lost huge, strategically important territories and millions of people. The second time we will not allow such a mistake, we have no right.

Those who claim world domination, publicly, with impunity and, I emphasize, without any reason, declare us, Russia, their enemy. Indeed, today they have great financial, scientific, technological and military capabilities. We are aware of this and objectively assess the threats constantly being addressed to us in the economic sphere, as well as our ability to resist this impudent and permanent blackmail. I repeat, we evaluate them without illusions, extremely realistically.

As for the military sphere, modern Russia, even after the collapse of the USSR and the loss of a significant part of its potential, is today one of the most powerful nuclear powers in the world and, moreover, has certain advantages in a number of the latest types of weapons. In this regard, no one should have any doubts that a direct attack on our country will lead to defeat and dire consequences for any potential aggressor.

At the same time, technologies, including defense technologies, are changing rapidly. Leadership in this area is passing and will continue to change hands, but the military development of the territories adjacent to our borders, if we allow it, will remain for decades to come, and maybe forever, and will create an ever-growing, absolutely unacceptable threat for Russia. .

Even now, as NATO expands to the east, the situation for our country is getting worse and more dangerous every year. Moreover, in recent days, the leadership of NATO has been openly talking about the need to accelerate, speed up the advancement of the Alliance's infrastructure to the borders of Russia. In other words, they are hardening their position. We can no longer just continue to observe what is happening. It would be absolutely irresponsible on our part.

Further expansion of the infrastructure of the North Atlantic Alliance, the military development of the territories of Ukraine that has begun is unacceptable for us. The point, of course, is not the NATO organization itself - it is only an instrument of US foreign policy. The problem is that in the territories adjacent to us, I will note, in our own historical territories, an 'anti-Russia' hostile to us is being created, which has been placed under complete external control, is intensively settled by the armed forces of NATO countries and is pumped up with the most modern weapons.

For the United States and its allies, this is the so-called policy of containment of Russia, obvious geopolitical dividends. And for our country, this is ultimately a matter of life and death, a matter of our historical future as a people. And this is not an exaggeration - it is true. This is a real threat not just to our interests, but to the very existence of our state, its sovereignty. This is the very red line that has been talked about many times. They passed her.

In this regard, and about the situation in the Donbass. We see that the forces that carried out a coup d'etat in Ukraine in 2014, seized power and are holding it with the help of, in fact, decorative electoral procedures, have finally abandoned the peaceful settlement of the conflict. For eight years, endlessly long eight years, we have done everything possible to resolve the situation by peaceful, political means. All in vain.

As I said in my previous address, one cannot look at what is happening there without compassion. It was simply impossible to endure all this. It was necessary to immediately stop this nightmare - the genocide against the millions of people living there, who rely only on Russia, hope only on us. It was these aspirations, feelings, pain of people that were for us the main motive for making a decision to recognize the people's republics of Donbass.

What I think is important to emphasize further. The leading NATO countries, in order to achieve their own goals, support extreme nationalists and neo-Nazis in Ukraine in everything, who, in turn, will never forgive the Crimeans and Sevastopol residents for their free choice - reunification with Russia.

They, of course, will climb into the Crimea, and just like in the Donl
gangs of Ukrainian nationalists, Hitler's accomplices, killed defens
openly declare that they lay claim to a number of other Russian ter

The entire course of events and analysis of incoming information s
It is only a matter of time: they are getting ready, they are waiting f
nuclear weapons. We will not allow this to be done.

As I said earlier, after the collapse of the USSR, Russia accepted ne
treat all the newly formed countries in the post-Soviet space with r
sovereignty, and an example of this is the assistance we provided t

challenge to its statehood and integrity. But Russia cannot feel safe, develop, exist with a constant threat emanating from the territory of modern Ukraine.

Let me remind you that in 2000-2005 we gave a military rebuff to terrorists in the Caucasus, defended the integrity of our state, saved Russia. In 2014, they supported the Crimeans and Sevastopol residents. In 2015, the Armed Forces used to put a reliable barrier to the penetration of terrorists from Syria into Russia. We had no other way to protect ourselves.

The same thing is happening now. You and I simply have not been left with any other opportunity to protect Russia, our people, except for the one that we will be forced to use today. Circumstances require us to take decisive and immediate action. The people's republics of Donbass turned to Russia with a request for help.

In this regard, in accordance with Article 51 of Part 7 of the UN Charter, with the sanction of the Federation Council of Russia and in pursuance of the treaties of friendship and mutual assistance ratified by the Federal Assembly on February 22 this year with the Donetsk People's Republic and the Luhansk People's Republic, I decided to conduct a special military operation .

Its goal is to protect people who have been subjected to bullying and genocide by the Kiev regime for eight years. And for this we will strive for the demilitarization and denazification of Ukraine, as well as bringing to justice those who committed numerous, bloody crimes against civilians, including citizens of the Russian Federation.

At the same time, our plans do not include the occupation of Ukrainian territories. We are not going to impose anything on anyone by force. At the same time, we hear that recently in the West there are more and more words that the documents signed by the Soviet totalitarian regime, which consolidate the results of the Second World War, should no longer be carried out. Well, what is the answer to this?

The results of the Second World War, as well as the sacrifices made by our people on the altar of victory over Nazism, are sacred. But this does not contradict the high values of human rights and freedoms, based on the realities that have developed today over all the post-war decades. It also does not cancel the right of nations to self-determination, enshrined in Article 1 of the UN Charter.

Let me remind you that neither during the creation of the USSR, nor after the Second World War, people living in certain territories that are part of modern Ukraine, no one ever asked how they themselves want to arrange their lives. Our policy is based on freedom, the freedom of choice for everyone to independently determine their own future and the future of their children. And we consider it important that this right - the right to choose - could be used by all the peoples living on the territory of today's Ukraine, by everyone who wants it.

In this regard, I appeal to the citizens of Ukraine. In 2014, Russia was obliged to protect the inhabitants of Crimea and Sevastopol from those whom you yourself call 'Nazis'. Crimeans and Sevastopol residents made their choice to be with their historical homeland, with Russia, and we supported this. I repeat, they simply could not do otherwise.

Today's events are not connected with the desire to infringe on the interests of Ukraine and the Ukrainian people. They are connected with the protection of Russia itself from those who took Ukraine hostage and are trying to use it against our country and its people.

I repeat, our actions are self-defense against the threats posed to us and from an even greater disaster than what is happening today. No matter how difficult it may be, I ask you to understand this and call for cooperation in order to turn this tragic page as soon as possible and move forward together, not to allow anyone to interfere in our affairs, in our relations, but to build them on our own, so that it creates the necessary conditions for overcoming all problems and, despite the presence of state borders, would strengthen us from t
future.

I should also appeal to the military personnel of the armed forces

Dear comrades! Your fathers, grandfathers, great-grandfathers dic
Motherland, so that today's neo-Nazis seized power in Ukraine. Yo
not to the anti-people junta that plunders Ukraine and mocks thes

Don't follow her criminal orders. I urge you to lay down your weap
servicemen of the Ukrainian army who fulfill this requirement will
their families.

Once again, I insistently emphasize: all responsibility for possible bloodshed will be entirely on the conscience of the regime ruling on the territory of Ukraine.

Now a few important, very important words for those who may be tempted to intervene in ongoing events. Whoever tries to hinder us, and even more so to create threats for our country, for our people, should know that Russia's response will be immediate and will lead you to such consequences that you have never experienced in your history. We are ready for any development of events. All necessary decisions in this regard have been made. I hope that I will be heard.

Dear citizens of Russia!

Well-being, the very existence of entire states and peoples, their success and viability always originate in the powerful root system of their culture and values, experience and traditions of their ancestors and, of course, directly depend on the ability to quickly adapt to a constantly changing life, on the cohesion of society, its readiness to consolidate, to gather together all the forces in order to move forward.

Forces are needed always - always, but strength can be of different quality. The policy of the 'empire of lies', which I spoke about at the beginning of my speech, is based primarily on brute, straightforward force. In such cases, we say: 'There is power, mind is not needed.'

And you and I know that real strength lies in justice and truth, which is on our side. And if this is so, then it is difficult to disagree with the fact that it is the strength and readiness to fight that underlie independence and sovereignty, are the necessary foundation on which you can only reliably build your future, build your home, your family, your homeland. .

Dear compatriots!

I am confident that the soldiers and officers of the Russian Armed Forces devoted to their country will professionally and courageously fulfill their duty. I have no doubt that all levels of government, specialists responsible for the stability of our economy, financial system, social sphere, heads of our companies and all Russian business will act in a coordinated and efficient manner. I count on a consolidated, patriotic position of all parliamentary parties and public forces.

Ultimately, as it has always been in history, the fate of Russia is in the reliable hands of our multinational people. And this means that the decisions made will be implemented, the goals set will be achieved, the security of our Motherland will be reliably guaranteed.

I believe in your support, in that invincible strength that our love for the Fatherland gives us.

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